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Sent: Wednesday, March 23, 2016 11:53 AM

To: HSSframework

Subject: Objections to South Asianist recommendations against Hinduism

(nihar, sandeep and shrI arumuganAtha in bcc)

Dear Instructional Quality Commission,

South Asianists have successfully caused you to **replace almost all references to ancient India and Hinduism with “South Asia” and “religion of Ancient India”**. It looks like my letter dated 2015-11-22 (reproduced below) was in vain, since you seem to have proposed acceding to these very changes. This despite the fact that most of the arguments presented in that letter were not addressed, much less refuted, by the South Asianists. I have also observed that the Uberoi foundation and others have voiced their concern about this decision of yours - I fully support their letters. But, since they may have missed a few arguments and are just too kind descend to the level of the South Asianists, let me augment their arguments with some specifics.

On the continuity of Hinduism since ancient times and its importance

The South Asianists try to hide the essential continuity of Hinduism and present the “religion of Ancient India” as being different. In this section, I add to the arguments presented in my aforementioned letter dated 2015-11-22.

- There is some **essential continuity** in Hindu principles and practices:
 - There is **continuity of Hindu ***principles*****.
 - The same old puruShArtha-s, concepts of RNa, yajna, karma, mokSha, Ananda that motivated the vedic seers motivate us.
 - There is **continuity of the core of Hindu practices**
 - The **same old nature deities** (sun, moon, stars, planets, trees, snakes, Indra, Shri, Rudra, forefathers etc..) are still being adored by modern hindus.
 - Every year, many **fire sacrifices are conducted more or less exactly as they were** four thousand years ago.
 - Many hindus undergo the **exact same rites of passage** (saṃskāra-s) seen in the gRhya-sutra-s of the late vedic period.
 - Even the **same old jAti/ varNa system** (taking the scholarly position to be true, for the sake of argument) is observed in the late vedic age and in fairly recent hinduism.
 - There is **continuity in the chains of religious transmission**.
 - In all major Hindu religious traditions, the chains of transmission extend back to the vedic times and beyond.
 - There is **not a clear break** between “Ancient South Asian religion” (sic) and Hinduism.
 - For example, many Hindus formally introduce themselves in rituals by the sage they descend from, the ancient branch of the Vedas they are bound to study and the ancient gRhyasUtra norms they strive to follow in their rites.
 - What has **changed is the periphery** - the form, not the essence.

- In fact, this avowed **ability and commitment to change** in response to newer circumstances is an essential aspect of Hindu thought, which makes it “eternal” from the Hindu perspective, as described below.
 - It is perverse to use this essential feature of Hindu thought to undermine its ancient continuity.
- This **sense of continuity is essential** to Hindu thought.
 - Even later Hindu texts often claimed authority for themselves based on their **faithfulness to older Hindu sagely thought** (such as what’s found in the Vedas).
 - Indeed, a common Hindu term for referring to themselves is “**sanAtana dharma**” (**eternal principles**). The Hindu religious way is eternal because of its deep continuity, unbroken traditions, adaptability and naturalness (non-artificiality). This is not being adequately communicated by this framework, and is being further undermined by South Asianists.
 - Renaming Hinduism to Ancient Indian religion amounts to an attempted **attack on this sense of continuity** in Hindu thought and practice.
 - The children of California (not just Hindu children) will be **swindled** out of this important insight.
- Note the **disparity in their treatment of Hinduism vs other religious traditions**
 - The **Jews** of 2k years ago practiced animal sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. The Torah is clear that Abraham's God loves animal sacrifice. Furthermore, the Torah says that the Jews had some caste system (with Levites being priests etc..). All this does not hold true in modern Judaism. Yet, you don't undermine the continuity of Judaism by referring to its older forms as "Ancient semitic religion".

Conclusion

Renaming Hinduism to Ancient Indian religion amounts to an attempted **attack on this sense of continuity** in Hindu thought and practice.

The children of California (not just Hindu children) will be **swindled** out of this important insight.

Questioning the **South Asianist scholarly authority**

The commission seems to provide unwarranted weight to these recommendations of the South Asianists, even at the cost of ignoring scholarly arguments from Professors writing on behalf of the Uberoi foundation, because they are under the impression that they are very accomplished, unbiased, well meaning scholars. This cannot be farther from the truth. The South Asianists are **not** well meaning and unbiased.

- They are partly **motivated by politics**. This is evidenced by the following:
 - They make numerous **references to “Hindu nationalism”**, implying their opposition to that movement.
 - Several of the people involved in these proposals are **chronic pamphleteers** (including **Kamala Visweswaran**) who opposed among other things:
 - <http://goo.gl/LwK7mG> where Kamala Visweswaran calls for the boycott of Israel.
 - <http://goo.gl/h4nnQI> where she asks Silicon Valley companies not to engage with the Prime Minister of India.
- Their **political motivations are notorious** in the Hindu world as well.

- There is perhaps no academic discipline as hated by the subjects of their study as South Asianists are. This is evidenced by works such as those by Rajiv Malhotra (look him up), and many petitions against their influence, such as this one (<https://goo.gl/1QiSw7>) signed by several prominent dissenting academics.
- Their **entire approach to the study** of Hindu thought and practice is **flawed**, due to being too text-centric and history-centric.
 - Hinduism are **not a “religion of the book”**, unlike the Abrahamic religions that provide a background to the “South Asian”ists.
 - Furthermore, it is slightly misleading to even call Hinduism is even a “religion of the library”, given that the **texts themselves declare their incompleteness** and lower station relative to direct experience.
 - Their use of Freudian-like analysis to understand Hindu work is also quite famously ridiculous. For example, see **Robert Goldman**, professor at UC Berkeley and one of the present pamphleteers, analyze the Hindu deity Hanuman in terms of a stiffening penis: <http://i.imgur.com/V3h2yRT.png>.
- They are, for obvious reasons, motivated by the desire to increase the value of the **"South Asia" brand**. If this is not the case, let them accept our proposed change to “Indian subcontinent”.

Conclusion

Given the above you should ask yourself, dear committee, if you want to keep supporting this **anti-Israel, anti-India, anti-Hindu pamphleteers** masquerading as great scholars, or if you will listen to scholars and practitioners with greater authority and command over the relevant subjects under discussion, and who moreover present stronger arguments in this debate affecting the education of our precious children.

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ॐ शान्तिः। (Peace, peace, peace)

Vishvas /विश्वासः

2015-11-22 21:24 GMT-08:00 विश्वासो वासुकिजः (Vishvas Vasuki) :

Dear

Instructional Quality Commission, While appreciating the interest of "South Asia Faculty Textbook Committee" towards ensuring veracity of the framework, we note several systemic defects in their recommendations. Several eminent scholars and common people have voiced their opposition to their “Area studies” narrative: for example, see <https://www.change.org/p/concerned-indians-statement-on-hypocrisy-and-indian-history> . We would like to specifically highlight our objection to some of their recommendations:

- The de-hinduification and South-Asia-ification of the framework.
 - We caution that the "South Asia Studies Faculty Review" has an obvious vested interest in promoting the increased use of the term "South Asia" (the brand their academic discipline goes by) at the cost of the more familiar and accurate references to the people and culture involved - in particular those pertaining to the Hindu residents of California.

- Indeed this “South-Asia-ification” effort is an assault of Hindu identity and self-image, as discussed below.
 - The end result of this effort is that Hindu children will have a harder time relating themselves to their forefathers in the Gupta, Maurya and Vedic ages, despite being the proximate inheritors their culture.
 - The attempt to separate Tamil from the north Indian culture, and then postulating that the “Hindu” term is inadequate is deeply concerning - it reminds us of the colonial “divide and rule” policy.
 - Effacement of the “Hindu” term is equivalent to saying that simply because Hinduism is not made in the mold of Abrahamic religions and does not have a dogma and a central cannon, its ancient age and continuity may be questioned.
- Just because there was no notion of "gravitational force" a million years ago, it does not mean that the gravitational force did not exist. Even by this rather strange logic, it is ridiculous to state that the term "Hindu" or "India" is less appropriate than the term "South Asian" since "South Asian" is of even more recent provenance.
 - Hinduism, which in the current parlance, refers to all native Indian pagan traditions - excluding traditions such as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism according to some people, but not according to others. This will naturally include ancient Tamil and Indus valley religious traditions.
 - It is clear (since at least the time of 3rd century BCE book Indica by Megasthenes that Ancient India encompasses all regions referred to by the term "South Asia". Hence, recommendations such as "p. 265 Replace “India” on lines 729 and 731 with “South Asia” and "We recommend changing the Title of this Section to “The Early Civilizations of South Asia.”" should not be accepted.
- In light of the above, some of the purported benefits of the “South Asian” usage do not hold up from our perspective. For example -
 - While we wholeheartedly welcome mentioning (say) the Tamil classical tradition apart from the Sanskrit one, we object to the insinuation that Tamil classical tradition is not a Hindu tradition, which is evident in statements such as “In holding that Hinduism (and by extension, the Vedas, and Sanskrit) provides the definitive template for teaching about ancient South Asia, students may be disadvantaged from a more scientific approach to understanding the IVC, diverted from learning more about other classical traditions, such as the Tamil one”. Nay, Tamils have since ages immemorial identified with the broader Hindu culture. For example, the vedic sage Agastya is said to have chaired the earliest Tamil Sangam (literary conferece).
 - We find no basis for the notion that the use of the terms “Hindu” and “India” “productively connecting the Aryan peoples to Central Asian societies (for example, by comparing the Rg Veda to the Avesta of the Zoroastrians)”.
- The "South Asia Studies Faculty Review" is itself inconsistent and selective in its replacement of the terms "Hindu" and India with other terms including "South Asian" (which illustrates the inherent difficulty of their de-hinduification project). For example, contrast their recommendations:
 - "We recommend deleting “Hindu background” from this sentence, “Through the story of his life, his Hindu background, and his search for enlightenment, students may learn about his fundamental ideas:

- suffering, compassion, and mindfulness.” The Buddha was a member of the Sakya clan; nothing called Hinduism existed at this moment in time”
- "Replace with, “Although Buddhism waned in the Indian subcontinent in the late first millennium CE as the result of a resurgence of Hindu tradition, vibrant Buddhist communities still thrive in India, Nepal, and Bhutan.””
 - Deemphasis of harmony and cultural unity among native Hindu traditions (including buddhism and jainism).
 - Islam is not presented as lacking a cultural unity due to its various sects. Christianity is not presented as in fact not being Christianity but rather a conglomerate of various denominations with opposing beliefs. Why this irrational need for complex academic arguments to single out and deny Hinduism a unified existence?
 - We object to the proposed removal of the bold text in “Many of the central practices of Hinduism today, including home and temple worship, yoga and meditation, rites of passage (samskaras), festivals, pilgrimage, respect for saints and gurus, and, above all, **a profound acceptance of religious diversity**, developed over this period.” The suggested justification is that was much internal conflict and persecution during the Vedic Period which lead to the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism. Though internal conflict did exist and though there were very rare (obviously exaggerated) tales of persecution, they are more the exception than the norm. In the history of many other world religions, it would be very unusual to find the very same ruler supporting diverse and competing religious traditions (Chola and Gupta support for Buddhism as well as Hinduism), to find rulers of the very same dynasty shifting their personal preference from one generation to the next (For example in the Maurya dynasty, Chandragupta went with Jainism, Ashoka with Buddhism), to find poets and philosophers (such as Kshemendra and Abhinavagupta) respecting both the Buddha and the Hindu deities. All this was common in the Hindu context. Furthermore, this undermines some of the fundamental universal tenets of Hinduism, such as “ekam sad viprah bahudha vidanti” (The single truth is known differently by different sages). Further, our note below illustrates the fact that several Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sources distinguish the cultural other (mleccha-s) from ancient Indian people - this points to a certain feeling of unity that existed among these suggestions. We note that this attempt to deemphasize the religious liberal attitude is connected to what is called the “Negationist’s second front” in Koenraad Elst’s work ([here](http://koenraadelst.bharatvani.org/books/negaind/ch2.htm) - <http://koenraadelst.bharatvani.org/books/negaind/ch2.htm>), which examines several facts relevant to the issue.
 - We strongly object to the recommendation to delete in Pg. 262, lines 709-10, “Even though India was not unified into one state, nor did its people belong to a single religion, the entire area was developing a cultural unity.” The cultural unity of India is apparent in Indian literary works which describe various regions and customs of India (take Kalidasa’s Raghuvamsha or the Mahabharata as prominent examples). Further, there was a clear notion of the cultural other (called mleccha-s) is apparent in medieval works- Skandapurāṇa, Rājataranī, Somadeva-sūri’s texts, Kathāsaritsāgara 18 ([Wikisource](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Kathasaritsa%20sarg%2018)), Bilhana’s Karnaśundarī, the Kālacakra-tantra etc.. To add to this, there was a clear (though not static) notion of what constituted the “Āryāvarta” or the land of the cultured people. All this points to a sense of pan-Indic cultural unity. Please see “Nationalism: Its Theory and Principles in India” by Parmanand Parashar for further details and references.

- Islamic apologetics
 - We strongly object to the proposed replacement of the sentence: “Anti-Western violence perpetrated by the followers of a fundamentalist version of Islam has contributed to the appearance of deep conflict between the Islamic and Western worlds, especially since 9/11. Students should learn about the roots of modern Islamic extremism by reading a variety of sources from Egyptian writers and the Muslim Brotherhood, for example” with something more beneficent to Islam and maleficent to Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism. It is a matter of fact that most anti-western violence in recent times is Islamic in origin (far more than those originating in Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism). The attempt to hide this fact smacks of partisanship and mendacity.
- Other minor inaccuracies
 - With regards to the following recommendation: “We recommend changing “Telagu” to “Telegu” pg. 211, line 819”, we note that Telugu is the right spelling (in conformance with the native reference to the language - తెలుగు).

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Vishvas /विश्वास: